



**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the International Labour Office
on the occasion of
World Day for Safety and Health at Work**

28 April 2010

It is time to make a concerted effort to ensure that occupational safety and health is an integral element of strategies for strong, sustainable and balanced development. Workers and their families, enterprises, societies and economies stand to benefit.

Every day some 6,300 people die as a result of work-related injuries or diseases – more than 2.3 million deaths per year. Each of the 337 million workplace accidents that occur each year commonly results in extended absences from work.

The human cost of this daily tragedy is immeasurable. But the economic cost of working days lost, medical treatment and cash benefits paid out is estimated at 4 per cent of global GDP each year. This exceeds the total value of the stimulus packages introduced in the face of the economic crisis of 2008-09.

We are still dealing with the consequences of workplace hazards of the past. At the same time we are confronted with new occupational safety and health challenges in a world of work undergoing rapid transformation. Many occupational hazards remain hidden and ignored, particularly in the informal economy.

On this World Day we highlight the emerging risks and new approaches to prevention in a changing world of work. Technological progress is accompanied by new workplace risks, diverse employment arrangements and changing workforce demographics.

New risks have emerged in fields such as nanotechnology application, biotechnology and chemical handling. An ageing workforce and increases in the numbers of female workers, migrant workers and informal workers also have implications for occupational safety and health strategies. Another striking development is the rise in psychosocial conditions linked to new stresses and strains of work in the global economy. Recently the adverse impact of the economic crisis on enterprises has taken its toll on many workers.

Prevention strategies must be responsive to this environment. And occupational safety and health management systems constantly reassessed and strengthened if they are to be up to the task of overcoming the legacy of poor practices in the past, meeting present challenges and anticipating the risks of the future.

Experience shows that prevention works for all.

In building and sustaining recovery, let us draw on the opportunity to shape integrated decent work strategies in which safety and health is a key component. In the wake of the crisis, let us act together to prevent a downward spiral in labour conditions and build recovery founded on safe work.

A wide range of international labour standards and codes of practice on occupational safety and health is available to give guidance on reaching this goal. On this World Day let us recommit to working together to translate them into sound policies and good practices that yield positive results for all.

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